Pamphlet Binders and their use in research libraries — *by Randy Silverman*

By definition, research libraries have a commitment to preserving pamphlets as well as all print and non-print media they collect. A discussion of the preservation requirements for pamphlets is useful for their survival, and pamphlet binders are an important tool in preparing these often ephemeral "thin books" for storage and circulation. Specifications concerning the permanence requirements of a library's pamphlet binders can eliminate harmful shelf preparation and save costs in replacing binders that eventually damage the pamphlet.

In an earlier study (Silverman 1988) specifications for a binding structure appropriate for conserving pamphlets were defined. Two elements of these specifications are applicable to commercially produced pamphlet binders as well. They are: 1) The physical attachment between the pamphlet and the binder should not damage the pamphlet over time, and 2) the durability and chemical stability of the materials used in the binder's manufacture should promote the long-term storage requirements of the library.

Pamphlet binders are an important tool in preparing for storage and circulation

Many types of commercially produced pamphlet binders do not address these points. The most blatant offenders cause damage to the pamphlets they house due to the adhesive attachment between the pamphlet and the binder. This type of binder uses a pre-gummed cloth flange. The adhesive, in coming in contact with the pamphlet, tends to stiffen and eventually break the first and last leaves of the pamphlet at the hard edge created by the flange. Even if the leaves do not break, the adhesive can "skin" these pages if delamination occurs, or discolor the paper as the adhesive cross-links to it — either of which may cause the loss of significant information from what is quite often the pamphlet's title page. Additionally, adhesive attachments that affect the spine of the pamphlet restrict its openability.

Another common form of physical damage is caused by stapling the pamphlet to the binder through the pamphlet's side. This is unnecessary for material that was previously sewn or stapled through the fold, as it restricts the pamphlet's openability and forces the paper to crease and become weakened at the edge created by the staple. If the pamphlet was originally sewn or stapled through the side, repeating the process by stapling it to a pamphlet binder can be argued to be no more damaging than was the original method of manufacture. However, a pamphlet anticipated to receive heavy use, an older pamphlet with weakened paper, or a pamphlet already damaged by this method of side-stitching may require the added expense of sewing through the fold to improve what may be a damaging method of attachment. In the case of pamphlets that are adhesive bound, stapling through the side may be considered acceptable if the width of the inner margin allows; again, so long as the practice does not result in needless physical damage.

Loss can be easily prevented by using a non-damaging pamphlet binder

Chemical degradation of the pamphlet's paper can be caused by housing the pamphlet in a binder manufactured from acidic materials. Problems associated with the migration of acids from the binder to the pamphlet are multiplied by the binder's greater mass than that of the pamphlet. This condition is augmented by the centuries of storage a pamphlet may undergo, further accelerating its chemical deterioration.

All of these forms of damage are unacceptable within the context of permanent retention, as they result in ongoing repair costs or irreversible damage to the collection. This loss can be easily prevented by using a non-damaging pamphlet binder.

What follows are criteria for a durable, non-damaging pamphlet binder appropriate for thin material of one, two, or more sections. Materials used in the binder's manufacture should be rigid enough to prevent physical damage from abrasion. Ideally, paper-based materials used in the binder should be alkaline, or if polyester, of archival quality. Cloth used in the binder's construction should be durable. Pressure-sensitive adhesives applied to the cloth should never come into contact with the pamphlet itself. Pockets used to contain separate parts (such as music or maps) should be made of durable alkaline paper.

When binding, the pamphlet should be attached

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to the binder (whenever the original sewing or stapling allows) by sewing or stapling through the fold. In the case of paper that is weakened, sewing may prove less stressful over time than stapling. The stress of this attachment can be minimized by using a "free guard," that is, a fold of Japanese paper placed (without adhesive) in the center of the section before sewing. This acts as a reinforcement between the thread and paper.

If a pamphlet was stitched through the side (by thread or staple) it can be attached to the binder by side stitching again if the paper can withstand the process. While this provides a practical solution to this problem, it should be done with discretion as stabbing can result in damage to the pamphlet. Side stitching is an imperfect time saving technique for pamphlets with damaged spine folds, which are better mended before being sewn through the fold.

Pamphlets that are adhesive bound (as is the case with many journals today) can be successfully sewn through what would have been the fold, or stapled through the side. No adhesive attachment between the pamphlet and binder should be necessary.

There are many pamphlet binders commercially available. In choosing a binder, the research library is advised to weigh the long-term effects the structure and materials will have on thousands of pamphlets slated for permanent retention. The cost of upkeep and repair should be factored into the original price, as short-term savings may result in significantly higher operating costs in the long run.

Silverman, R. "Small, Not Insignificant: An Examination of Pamphlet Binding Structures." American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works 6 (1988):111-139.

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